

GLOW'S LONGITUDINAL STUDY REPORT

Overview:

This document explores the **experiences of women working in blue-collar or entry level roles** (primarily focusing on warehousing and delivery partner roles) across 4 Indian cities. It unpacks their motivations, challenges, and transformations in these roles, and lays out actionable recommendations for companies and ecosystem actors to improve job quality and enable sustained participation of women in the workforce.

The learnings mentioned in this document are based on GLOW's **longitudinal study conducted over ~2 years with 26 women – 12 warehouse workers and 14 delivery partners**. GLOW conducted a total of 67 interviews (see break-up below) interacting with each woman once every 4-5 months. While all 26 women were employed in GLOW's partner companies at the start of the study, 5 women switched jobs during the study and 2 women left the workforce.

The document also covers 3 detailed case studies.

City of 1 st interview	Job role during 1 st interview	Round 1 interview month	# of women interviewed					Total
			Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	
Hyderabad	Delivery partner	Jul-24	12	10	0	0	0	22
Noida	Warehouse worker	Jul-23	6	6	6	6	0	24
Chennai	Delivery partner	Aug-23	2	1	1	1	1	6
Bhiwandi	Warehouse worker	Feb-24	6	5	4	0	0	15
Total # of interviews			26	22	11	7	1	67

Executive Summary:

GLOW's longitudinal study of 26 women, predominantly working in entry-level warehousing and delivery partner roles, offers valuable insights into their motivations, job experiences, and challenges. For many women, the primary reason for joining the workforce was financial necessity, as they sought to support household expenses, fund children's or sibling's education, or repay loans. The warehousing and delivery partner roles did not require prior experience, making them accessible options for first time workers as well as for women who were working in different roles earlier. Women were attracted to warehousing jobs for the promise of better earnings and a lighter workload, particularly in terms of lifting weights, while delivery partner roles offered flexibility in working hours.

Both the warehousing and delivery roles offered a level of financial stability. Most women earned INR 12,000 - 15,000 per month for 5–7 hours of work as delivery partners or 9-hour shifts as warehouse workers — this represented an improvement of over 50% from their previous jobs for many. However, these roles also came with a number of challenges. Warehouse workers expressed concerns about unfavourable leave policies and inadequate transportation facilities, while delivery partners highlighted low earnings, difficult working conditions, and safety concerns, particularly when riding in harsh weather. Despite these challenges, 24 out of 26 women remained employed, with 19 staying in the same role and company. For those who left, the primary drivers of attrition were non-renewal of contracts, low earnings, and physical strain.

The impact of employment on women's personal lives was notably positive, as many women reported that financial independence enhanced their decision-making power, though health concerns also arose due to the physical demands of the job.

Career progression, however, remained limited. While a few women made tangible strides, receiving salary increment and promotions over the course of the study, most women had low expectations for career growth, citing limited awareness of career paths and opportunities for advancement within their current companies.

In conclusion, women in blue-collar roles are demonstrating significant resilience and ambition. However, their progress is often hindered by systemic barriers, including limited awareness and access to leave entitlements, insufficient knowledge of social security benefits, lack of job security, and inadequate workplace infrastructure. Targeted and collaborative action is essential. Employers could promote inclusive recruitment practices, enable adequate rest for workers, streamline leave policies and career pathways, boost awareness of social security benefits, and invest in automation. Meanwhile, governments, funders, and civil society organizations could increase awareness and access to social security benefits, invest in enabling infrastructure (e.g., hostels), and run campaigns to shift societal norms on women's roles. These collective efforts will create a more supportive environment for women, ultimately promoting their long-term economic empowerment and participation in the workforce.

Detailed learnings:

Demographics, socio-economic background, and motivations to work:

The women interviewed for this study represented a diverse mix of life stages and socio-economic contexts, with noticeable patterns emerging across job roles. **Over half of the warehouse workers were below the age of 25.** Most of them were unmarried, and often migrants who had relocated for work.

In contrast, the **delivery partners were relatively older** — all 14 of them were above 25 years, and either married or widowed. Most were mothers to children above the age of 6, potentially indicating that their ability to take on work outside household responsibilities was facilitated by a reduced need for continuous childcare.

Despite these demographic variations, financial necessity emerged as a unifying driver for entering the workforce. **For 20 out of the 24 women who spoke about their motivations, the decision to work was influenced by the need to support household expenses, fund children's or siblings' education, or repay home or vehicle loans.**

"I will work as long as my health permits to support my children's education! My daughter has just completed her L.L.B degree—I want her to become an Advocate and a Judge one day" – Woman delivery partner, Last-mile delivery company

Prior work experience and skillset:

While the warehousing and delivery partner roles did not require prior experience, **22 out of the 26 women had previous work experience before joining GLOW's partner companies, although only 6 had worked in similar roles.** None of them were entrepreneurs or self-employed.

Interestingly all delivery partners¹ already knew how to ride a 2-wheeler and all of them² had access to a 2-wheeler (either their own or their husband's) before taking up this job, which directly facilitated their entry into the role. Most of them had learnt to ride a 2-wheeler from their male family members— driven by a mix of reasons including commuting to work, curiosity to ride, running errands, and picking up or dropping kids to school.

Entry pathways and role preferences:

Women's access to these jobs came through both informal and digital channels, often varying by role. **For warehouse workers, personal networks played a dominant role— most were referred to the job by friends or family. Delivery partners, on the other hand, were more likely to find opportunities online, learning about their current role through social media platforms.** However, referrals remained a significant secondary channel for delivery partners as well. This variation between roles is partly driven by company's recruitment strategies

¹ 11 out of 14 delivery partners responded to this question

² 13 out of 14 delivery partners responded to this question

— with delivery roles being harder to fill with women candidates, companies have increasingly turned to digital platforms to broaden their outreach.

The reasons women chose a particular role also reflected their individual needs and circumstances. **Warehouse workers often cited prospect of better earnings and handling lighter parcels³ as reasons for applying to these jobs. Delivery partner roles, by contrast, were more appealing for the flexibility they offered** — allowing women to choose their working hours, take breaks between deliveries, and balance work with household responsibilities.

“I shifted to the DA job from the fitness trainer job because of the flexible timings. I wanted a job that allowed me to spend maximum time with my child” – Woman delivery partner, Hyperlocal delivery company

Job experience, earnings and benefits:

The daily realities of women working in warehousing and delivery roles reflect both opportunities for economic empowerment and persistent gaps in job quality.

Most women across both warehousing and delivery partner roles earned between INR 12,000 to 15,000 per month, an improvement (of over 50%) from their previous jobs for many. Most workers were satisfied with the recruitment and onboarding process, and the basic amenities at the workplace such as clean drinking water and functioning washrooms. Women who migrated for the warehousing roles usually got PG accommodation or House Rent Allowance (HRA) from the company.

The **fixed 9-hour shifts** in warehousing roles offered predictability that was valued by many women, but it limited flexibility. **Unfavourable leave policies left little room for emergencies or time-off. Further, while 11 out of 12 warehouse workers had access to company-provided transportation, in some cases it was limited to only evening drop-offs, which made morning commute to the warehouse a challenge.**

“I feel the leave approval process is very stringent and leave is not approved when I fall sick. It is not easy to take leave even if my mother is unwell, and they cut the salary even for genuine reasons” – Woman warehouse worker, Logistics company

Awareness of social security benefits was notably limited. Among the warehouse workers interviewed, **5 out of 9 were unaware of the Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) benefits. Further, none of the women interviewed knew about the 26-week maternity leave entitlement under ESIC**— a glaring gap in awareness.

Unlike warehouse workers, delivery partners generally reported shorter working hours, ranging from **5 to 7 hours a day**, which allowed them to manage their household responsibilities alongside paid work. For delivery partners, the challenges, while different in form, were equally significant. **Several women spoke about low earnings, difficult working conditions and safety concerns.** Riding 2-wheelers for long hours under the blazing sun, during rains or through poorly lit streets after dusk created constant stress.

Despite these hardships, **24 out of 26 women interviewed continue to be employed, and 19 have stayed on in the same role and company⁴**, hopeful that with some additional support, they could continue and even thrive. Warehouse workers called for improved leave policies and pick-up service. Meanwhile, delivery partners hoped for better financial support and increments in their salaries to make the job more sustainable.

³ Mostly cited by workers who had prior experience in similar roles

⁴ This is per the latest interviews (including interviews with 5 women who discontinued with the study)

Reasons for attrition:

Despite the high retention witnessed in the cohort interviewed for this study, the stories of those who left, or had previously switched roles shed light on the pressures that can disrupt this stability.

Few key patterns emerged across 20 responses to why women left or switched away from a warehousing or delivery partner role, either before or during the study. **The most common cause of exit was non-renewal of employment contracts or business closures for warehouse workers.** These exits were largely beyond the control of the workers themselves, reflecting the volatility and informality that often characterizes employment for this segment of women. **Across both the roles, low earnings and physical strain also emerged as critical factors.**

"No matter, whichever company I join back and work, there will be a heavy workload, which will affect my health. All the healing and good health I gained in the last 5-6 months will go in vain" – an ex-warehouse worker, Logistics company

Impact of job on personal life:

The jobs provided women with greater financial stability and, for many, enhanced their autonomy within the household. Women primarily used their earnings to cover household expenses, with mothers also spending on school fees and migrants sending a portion of their income back home. **Many women cited that financial independence enhanced their decision-making power within the family⁵.** Managing household responsibilities alongside work did not appear to be a major challenge for most women—14 out of 20 reported no difficulties in balancing the two. Additionally, most women said their families continued to support their decision to work.

"Yes, I feel proud as my salary was used to pay the advance deposit for the house we recently shifted to" – Woman delivery partner, Last-mile delivery company

However, the working conditions and nature of the job itself took a toll on their physical well-being. **6 out of the 18 women reported that their job negatively affected their physical health and well-being outside of work** (including disruptions in sleep cycle). Among the 4 women who eventually left their jobs during the study, 2 shared that their health had since improved.

Career progression and future aspirations:

While a few women made tangible strides in their careers during the study, overall, career progression remained limited. **Of the 24 women who continued working during the study period, 6 saw an average salary increase of 30% over the course of the study.** Given the lack of career paths in these entry level roles, promotions were rare – **just 2 women were promoted during this time**, one a graduate and the other a diploma holder. Their promotions, however, led to significant increments in salary from INR 12,300 to INR 18,200 and from INR 12,000 to INR 20,000 respectively. For women who switched jobs during the study, gains were relatively modest. In 4 out of 7 instances where women moved to a new job, they reported a marginal increase in their earnings, averaging only about 8% while others either continued earning the same amount or saw their earnings decline. This suggests that the potential to increase earnings was not the sole factor driving their decision to switch jobs— other considerations such as health concerns, contract terminations or other personal reasons were also instrumental.

⁵ 15 out of 18 women reported feeling financially independent from taking up a job. Of the 15, 7 said it had increased their say in family matters, 3 shared that they were already consulted prior to employment, and 5 did not observe any increase

Despite these isolated cases of progression, **most women hold low expectations for career growth.**

Out of 22 women interviewed about their aspirations, 16 stated that they did not expect to grow within their current companies. This sentiment was fuelled by limited awareness about available career paths. Warehouse workers voiced a clear need for more transparency and communication around promotions and career pathways. They spoke about wanting greater clarity on the criteria for promotions, as well as access to training programs that could help them qualify for higher roles. The desire for more stable, on-roll employment offering basic benefits such as paid sick leaves was also strong. Despite these gaps, a few women remained highly motivated, even willing to prioritize their careers over personal milestones.

"The company should give us an idea about the growth prospects within the firm and inform us clearly how many months of work or what skillset qualify us for a promotion. Most people switch jobs because of the lack of awareness on these aspects even though they might be interested to work" – Woman warehouse worker, Logistics company

"I have asked my family to keep my wedding on hold because I expect a TL promotion. I don't want the leave taken for my wedding to affect my chances of being promoted." – Woman warehouse worker, Logistics company

Most women expressed a desire to continue working, with over half of them looking to continue in the same role for a year or more. Those who expressed a desire to switch jobs soon were driven by concerns around low pay, lack of promotions, and the insecurity of their current employment arrangements. Women who had exited the workforce also hoped to resume working soon, preferably in desk-based roles, government jobs offering greater stability, or entrepreneurial pursuits such as starting a small business. These reflections point to both the value women place on continued employment and their desire for more secure, better-paying, and growth-oriented opportunities.

Call to Action

Women in warehousing and delivery partner roles are proving their resilience and ambition, yet they face significant barriers that can only be addressed with targeted action by employers and other ecosystem players

- **For Employers:** Following 6 actions can help hire more women, and create a conducive workplace that promotes long-term retention
 - **Tailor recruitment strategies:**
 - Tap into referrals and trusted community networks such as women self-help groups or women cooperatives to hire women for warehousing roles
 - Leverage social media (e.g., Facebook or Instagram advertisements) to attract women for delivery partner roles
 - **Enable adequate rest:**
 - Provide warehouse workers with dedicated rest areas and rest breaks
 - Ensure delivery partners have access to hydration kits, protective gear such as raincoats, caps with neck flaps
 - Geo tag rest locations (e.g., shaded hubs, public rest points) in the delivery partner app
 - **Streamline leave policies:**
 - During onboarding, inform workers about available leaves (e.g., sick leaves) and the application process. Further, publish this information on notice boards
 - Instruct managers to approve short-term sick leaves (<2 days) without asking for proof
 - Sensitize managers that gender-specific health needs (e.g., menstrual pain) are valid reasons for sick leaves
 - **Promote awareness of ESIC benefits:**
 - Display a simple poster on ESIC eligibility and benefits (e.g., sickness benefit, maternity benefits)

- **Boost job security:**
 - Share clear criteria and timelines for on-roll conversion or promotion opportunities for warehouse workers, to build stability and trust
 - Spotlight promotion stories (e.g., warehouse picker getting promoted as a supervisor) to highlight available growth opportunities
- **Invest in automation:**
 - Invest in automation or ergonomic tools (e.g., battery-operated pallet trucks (BOPT), finger ring scanners, conveyors) to reduce manual labour and physical strain in warehousing roles
- **For funders, governments, and CSOs⁶:** Strengthening public services and infrastructure, and shifting mindsets on women's role can significantly boost women's workforce participation
 - **Promote awareness and access of ESIC benefits:**
 - Launch initiatives (e.g., multimedia campaigns, mandatory info-sessions by employers, community sessions by NGOs) to raise awareness about ESIC benefits and to support with the claim process
 - Simplify the claim process by reducing document requirements and providing clear visibility on claim status through the online portal
 - **Invest in enabling infrastructure:**
 - Improve access to affordable and good-quality hostels for working women
 - Improve and expand safe transportation options, especially in commercial belts in the outskirts (e.g., industrial parks, SEZs, logistics parks)
 - Invest in technology solutions such as panic buttons or mobile apps for reporting safety-related incidents in real-time
 - **Run campaigns to shift mindsets:**
 - Run multimedia campaigns to showcase women in the workforce (including in non-traditional roles), and to promote caregiving and domestic work as shared responsibility of spouses

⁶ Civil society organizations

Case study 1:

Divya (name changed to protect privacy), a young unmarried woman from Lucknow, works as an **Executive in a warehouse at a logistics company** in Delhi NCR.

Divya holds a diploma in fashion designing. She entered the workforce on a short-term contract secured through a personal connection at a large e-commerce company. She decided to move to this sector after realising that salaries in the fashion sector were not sufficient to sustain herself. She uses her salary to financially support her family, which includes her mother, and 2 sisters.

Divya has worked with her current employer for more than 2 years. After a lot of hard work and preparation (***"I am learning Excel and understanding the operations of the warehouse to keep myself prepared for the interview."***), she got promoted as an Executive within 8 months into her tenure.

Currently, she primarily works in the dock area, scanning outbound packages, whereas early in her tenure, she would do many tasks around the warehouse, such as feeding, bagging, and scanning. **She currently earns INR 20,000 per month, with her promotion leading to a ~60% hike on her joining salary of ~INR 12,000 per month.** She is satisfied with her current role and the benefits she receives, including bus transport facilities to and from the warehouse, House Rent Allowance (HRA), and coverage under the Employee State Insurance (ESIC). She has also referred two of her friends to the same role in her company.

Divya's journey has not been without obstacles. Since being promoted, she faces management-related challenges. Giving instructions to colleagues, particularly coworkers who perceive her as a peer or friend, is difficult. When Divya escalated this, the company communicated her role change to her colleagues and directed them to cooperate with her. This has helped her set clear boundaries at work.

However, her experience navigating other challenges has not been then same. Some managers are often reluctant to approve leaves, even after they were directed to grant leaves by HR. This inflexibility pressurizes employees to quit, and Divya has personally experienced health impacts and consequent pressure from her family to leave her job – ***"Operations Managers are unfazed, they are of the opinion for every worker who leaves, they can easily get 8-10 new workers who are ready to work without taking leaves"***, said Divya.

Despite the challenges, she is determined to grow further in her role. She is expecting another promotion - ***"I want to become a Team Leader and earn a higher salary (INR 25,000 per month)."*** However, she anticipates that marriage may disrupt her career and work-life balance. For now, she has requested her family to delay marriage discussions so she can focus on her career and health.

Divya continues to increase the financial support she sends home and remains a pillar for her family. She also mentors her younger sister, offering guidance and encouragement in her career.

Case study 2:

Rajni (name changed to protect privacy) is a Chennai-based graduate in computer applications, and a young mother navigating her career around motherhood and evolving priorities. Rajni **has explored various professions**—from error correction at a BPO to fitness, and gig work to teaching—each driven by her need to support her family (that includes her husband and 3-year-old daughter), maintain flexibility, and find personal fulfilment.

After graduating, Rajni began her career in a BPO but quickly transitioned into fitness as she found the corporate job stressful and struggled with last mile connectivity to her office space. She then worked as a gym trainer for three years, aimed at actualizing her aspiration of becoming a Zumba teacher.

Following the birth of her child, she realized that flexible timings are very important to her, owing to her childcare responsibilities. This led her to join as a **delivery partner in a hyperlocal delivery company**. Apart from the flexibility offered, Rajni was drawn to gig work as she felt she would have more control over her income as per the orders she fulfilled, and there won't be any pressure to chase targets.

However, gig work brought some challenges for Rajni too. It was physically taxing to deliver under the hot sun and manage rising fuel costs. At the first hyperlocal delivery company she worked at, she had to travel 15 km just to log in, which made the role economically unviable. Within just 5 months, she moved to a competitor that offered better logistics but came with a new set of challenges. The income she earned barely covered her fuel costs, as she often spent INR 1,200 per month on fuel for every INR 3,000 earned. Moreover, she felt the job was emotionally unrewarding. Social stigma around delivery jobs added emotional strain, ***“As a woman, I feel delivery work is not respected in society”***, she said.

Low income, physical taxation, and lack of respect contributed to her decision to leave gig work to work in her family-run oil mill store. She started managing the store while her husband took care of oil extraction. Though this provided her more flexibility, low earnings and lack of facilities such as a washroom or drinking water created challenges. Most importantly, she felt bored and dissatisfied with her role. ***“I am sitting in the shop for the whole day without anyone to talk to, I am only doing this for my husband.”*** This led her to start looking for other opportunities.

She currently works as a playschool teacher near her home, earning INR 7,500 per month. Although the pay is modest, she is content for now, as the job is less physically demanding, socially respected, and aligns with her evolving career interest in education. She does struggle to manage her domestic responsibilities, as early morning teaching hours now require her to complete all household chores before leaving for work, making her mornings hectic. Despite this, she greatly values the holidays that come with a teaching job, which enable her to spend time with her daughter as they have vacations at the same time. Her plan is to gain experience at her current school while pursuing additional certifications that will allow her to move into better-paid or more specialized teaching role.

Though she doesn't face financial compulsion to work anymore, **Rajni plans to continue teaching as she values the ability to contribute to household expenses and retain a sense of financial independence.**

Case study 3:

Deepa (name changed to protect privacy), a 21-year-old from Rurwhar village near Kanpur, belongs to a nuclear family with her father being the primary breadwinner for her mother and her 2 siblings. In June 2023, **at the age of 18, she stepped out of her village to take up her first job in Noida at a warehouse.** As of September 2024, she's back in Rurwhar, working as a '*Bank Mitra*' for a government bank while preparing for government service exams.

After completing her 12th standard and a certificate course in sewing machine operation, Deepa realized her interests lay outside stitching or tailoring. When her training center's placement manager suggested this company, she moved to Noida to start her first job in a logistics company. She explained ***"I also got a higher paying role at an e-commerce company but selected my current employer as my friend already worked here"***. Her family, particularly her father, supported the decision, and was proud of her initiative to become self-reliant.

As a warehouse worker, Deepa found the tasks easy and enjoyable. She appreciated the structured workflow, her team leader's guidance, and found the environment manageable, especially with hostel accommodation and transport provided by the company. Further, the presence of her friend was a steady source of support.

Despite initial optimism, multiple factors led Deepa to resign after 15 months. She experienced **limited growth opportunities, lack of overtime compensation, and inconsistencies in attendance tracking** that affected her monthly pay. She also faced challenges with demanding workload and rotating night shifts, which took a toll on her health. Despite raising these concerns with her managers, she did not feel adequately supported. Deepa described the work environment as difficult and felt that communication at times lacked professionalism. The impact on her well-being, coupled with limited prospects for advancement, ultimately led her to step away.

Currently back in Rurwhar, Deepa is now preparing for government service exams, including the Railways and Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UP-PSC), and has enrolled in an IAS coaching institute in Kanpur. **Her ultimate goal is to secure a government job that offers stability, policy clarity (e.g., promotion policy and criteria), and a respectful work environment.** Though no longer earning a fixed salary as a '*Bank Mitra*', she is recovering well from previous health issues and feels no change in her agency over finances. **She is confident her family will support her decisions, including delaying marriage until she turns 25.**